

The species accounts provide general information on a selection of species, but are a little inconsistent. Distribution and dietary information is provided for some species but not others, and some of the specific information is inaccurate. For example: the Common Tree Snake *Dendrelaphis punctulata* does not occur in Victoria (p. 51); and Tiger Snakes *Notechis scutatus* occur at altitudes higher than 900 m (p. 60) in the Victorian alps (at places such as Dinner Plain where they occur at over 1500 m).

The comparison of legless lizards with snakes is not completely accurate. Whilst it is true that, unlike snakes, most Pygopodid lizards have an obvious external ear aperture, lizards in the genus *Aprasia* do not have such an opening. Similarly, although the movements of Pygopodids are described here as 'distinctively lizard-like' (p. 102), there is no doubt that many propel themselves using lateral undulation, just like a snake.

The information in the Appendix is also a little inaccurate or outdated in places. The Brown Snake *Pseudonaja nuchalis* does not occur in New South Wales (p. 135) or South Australia (p. 136) — in these states this snake is now known to be *P. aspidorhyncha*. In Victoria, the Diamond Python occurs only in East Gippsland, where it is rare; consequently, it is unlikely to be a 'common nuisance' snake (as per the title of the table) in this state. It is unlikely

that File Snakes (Acrochordids) are a 'nuisance' in the Northern Territory (p. 139); also, for the Northern Territory both crocodiles and the Cane Toad *Bufo marinus* are listed in a table of 'nuisance snakes', and the Cane Toad is listed under 'Introduced reptiles' of Queensland.

The latest information on the implications of envenomation from even small elapid snakes suggests that bites from all species have the potential to cause serious medical issues. Consequently, the description (starting on p. 76) that some of the smaller elapid snakes are 'considered harmless' should be viewed with caution.

Despite these minor glitches, the sections most relevant to the book's title undoubtedly hit their mark. If you want to know the best way to avoid or manage unwanted interactions with snakes, this is the book for you.

#### References

- Coventry AJ and Robertson P (1991) *The Snakes of Victoria: a Guide to their Identification*. (Department of Conservation and Environment: East Melbourne)  
Davies RG, Webber LM and Barnes GS (2004) Urban wildlife management – it's as much about people! In *Urban Wildlife: More Than Meets the Eye*. Eds D Lunney and S Burgin. (Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales: Sydney)

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## Killers in Eden: The story of a rare partnership between men and killer whales

by Danielle Clode

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One has to feel a bit envious of Danielle Clode. She commences this book with a reflection on her experiences sailing around the Australian coast with her parents when she was young, and she finishes with reference to time spent researching in such places as the Scottish Hebrides and Iceland. Her biography gives further tantalising hints of a life devoted to study-

ing and writing about what was once called 'natural history'. However, she has at least one major regret — in all her travels she has never seen a Killer Whale *Orcinus orca*, the subject of this book.

Dr Clode recounts how, while on that sailing trip around Australia, she visited the Eden Killer Whale Museum and became fascinated

with the stories about the cooperation between the killer whales and whalers in Twofold Bay. Over nearly a century, it was recounted, killer whales helped human whalers to round up and kill whales that had swum into the Bay. The orcas would strike the water to announce the arrival of a whale to the shore-based whaling crews, and then help to herd it to where it could be harpooned, finally feasting on the lips and tongue and leaving the remainder of the body for human flensing and processing. Dr Clode's youthful visit to Eden also struck a chord with me because I was a teenager when I first visited Eden and learned about the killer whales. So I purchased and read Tom Mead's *Killers of Eden*. I was fascinated — although perhaps a bit sceptical about how much of it was mythology.

While the book is mostly focused on the killer whales of Eden, it also provides an entry into a wider examination of the nature of that species, which in turn reflects back upon and enhances an understanding of the history of the orcas of Twofold Bay. What is apparent is that while there is some myth and a great deal that is confusing and unknown, there is convincing evidence of the human–orca cooperative relationship. Orcas are highly adaptive social animals whose hunting patterns vary according to environmental circumstances. The young stay with their mothers for a long time, maybe even for life in the same pod, and are trained in the ways of hunting in particular local conditions. These frequently involve cooperative hunting, but can vary from deliberate beaching in order to snatch young seals off beaches or rocks to working with humans to catch and kill whales.

One of the most interesting results of Dr Clode's detailed research is that she is able to confirm and fill out the personalisation of the orcas who returned each year to Eden and became familiar companions of the whalers. They were recognisable from their distinctive dorsal fins as well as other markings, and from individual personality traits and differentiated roles in pod hunting. Biographies of several of the orcas are detailed, particularly Old Tom who was around for decades and who was renowned for his playful and even annoying behaviour. Tom may in fact have been a female, and because s/he was so long-lived may in reality have been

more than one animal. A skeleton labelled 'Old Tom' is now on exhibition in Eden.

It is possible that the orcas had a longer-term 'relationship' with the Aborigines of the Eden region, prior to arrival of the British, and certainly people of the Taua language group formed a major part of the whaleboat crews who worked Twofold Bay. Their expertise was extraordinary.

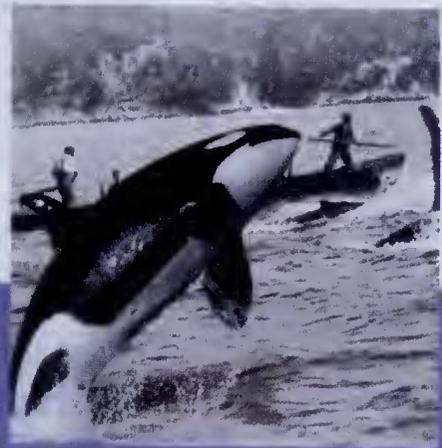
Another reason to feel admiration for Dr Clode is that she is an excellent science communicator. This is a very well written and informative book. It neatly balances its narrative and analysis, its research and personal reflection and its history and science. It is very readable and an excellent example of how well-written natural history can be informative and educational.

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**DANIELLE CLODE**